

October 12, 2022

Orono City Council
City of Orono
2750 Kelley Parkway
Orono, MN 55356
[VIA US MAIL AND EMAIL]

RE: Response to Offer for the Transition of the Long Lake Fire Department to Orono

Members of the Orono City Council,

The City Council of the City of Long Lake has reviewed your letter dated September 27, 2022 in which the City of Orono proposed an offer to purchase the Long Lake Fire Department (the “LLFD”) in exchange for a combination of a lump sum payment and the provision of services for a set rate, over a ten year period. As you are aware, our cities have been engaged in ongoing negotiations related to the future of fire services over the past several months through our respectively nominated subcommittee members. Throughout these discussions, the subcommittees have collaborated on designing a mutually agreeable third party oversight model that would result in Long Lake relinquishing control of the LLFD in favor of a board on which both cities would have weighted representation but neither would have complete control. The City of Long Lake believes the offer by our subcommittee members to relinquish control is a significant compromise. Substantial time and effort was put forth to reach an equitable design for this third party entity, whether in the form of a JPA, Fire District, or other comparable management entity.

Your September 27th letter amounts to an abrupt and substantial departure from this path in favor of a renewed proposal to transition full control of the LLFD to Orono and to designate Long Lake a contract city with minimal meaningful rights or say related to operations or management and no interest in present or future assets of the LLFD, even to the level of contribution. Long Lake continues to believe that the best long-term solution for the provision of fire services for both of our communities is a district or JPA model that involves the collaboration and contribution of multiple communities. This position is corroborated by numerous national and state-backed blue ribbon reports and best practices reviews which continue to recommend and encourage consolidation models to maximize efficiency, maintain or improve service, and control costs. Moreover, we have heard nearly every member of the Orono Council acknowledge this truth and express it is a path that will most likely be followed at some point.

When pressed for a reason why it is not pursued now, the primary response from Orono representatives has been a perceived lack of time. However, this is not a problem without a solution. Long Lake is willing to extend the terms of the present contract to facilitate this transition. To the extent major equipment purchase timelines are a concern, the cities can agree to bolster notice provisions to protect all parties. The parameters of the existing contract need not be a barrier to the cities reaching an optimal resolution for all involved.

Orono will undoubtedly understand that, in light of the substantial pivot in direction and the magnitude of the decisions involved, Orono's proposed deadline for resolution by October 15, 2022 is not reasonable or achievable. In addition to our due diligence review, Long Lake has committed to collecting community input before making an informed decision about such an offer that will affect the City's residents now and into the future. Long Lake is presently organizing an event to be held in November, when this updated input and community response will be gathered.

Long Lake firmly believes that the future of fire service for our communities is a decision that must be made through collaboration, not a "take it or leave it" proposition. Long Lake will continue its thorough analysis of all options and intends to carefully consider the community input that has and will be gathered. We will provide a response to Orono upon completion of this process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Charlie Miner". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name "Charlie" and last name "Miner" clearly distinguishable.

Charlie Miner, Mayor
On behalf of the Long Lake City Council